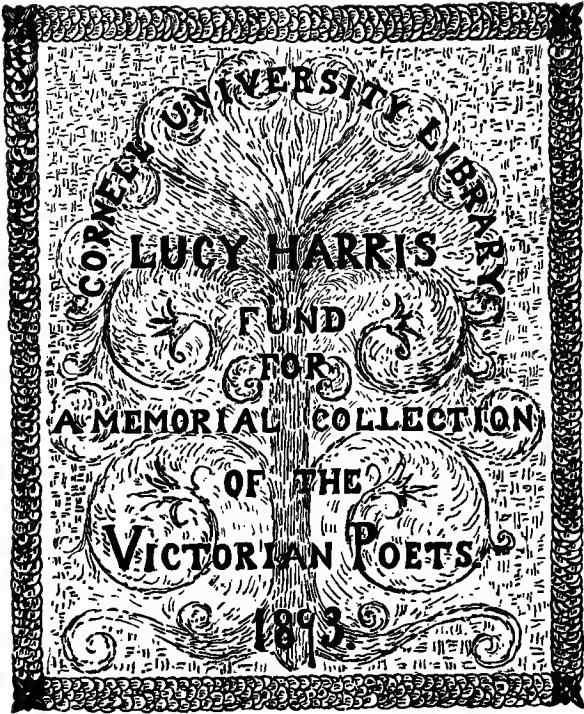


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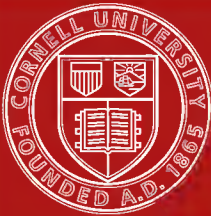


ODE TO
THE ENGLISH MARTYRS

By Francis Thompson

BURNS & OATES
28 ORCHARD STREET
LONDON

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TO THE
ENGLISH MARTYRS

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FRANCIS THOMPSON

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TO THE ENGLISH MARTYRS

RAIN, rain on Tyburn tree,
Red rain a-falling;
Dew, dew on Tyburn tree,
Red dew on Tyburn tree,
And the swart bird a-calling.
Thence it roots so fast and free,
Yet it is a gaunt tree,
Black as be
The swart birds alone that seek,
With red-bedabbled breast and beak,
Its lank black shadow falling.

The shadow lies on England now
Of the deathly-fruited bough,
Cold and black with malison
Lies between the land and sun;
Putting out the sun, the bough
Shades England now!

The troubled heavens do wan with care,
And burthened with the earth's despair
Shiver a-cold; the starvèd heaven
Has want with wanting man bereaven.
Blest fruit of the unblest bough!
Aid the land that smote you, now!
Which feels the sentence and the curse
Ye died if so ye might reverse.
When God was stolen from out man's mouth,
Stolen was the bread; then hunger and drouth
Went to and fro; began the wail,
Struck root the poor-house and the jail.
Ere cut the dykes, let through that flood,
Ye writ the protest with your blood;

Against this night wherein our breath
 Withers, the toiled heart perisheth,
 Entered the *caveat* of your death.
 Christ, in the form of His true Bride,
 Again hung pierced and crucified,
 And groaned, "I thirst!" Not still ye stood,—
 Ye had your hearts, ye had your blood;
 And pouring out the eager cup,—
 "The wine is weak, yet, Lord Christ, sup!"
 Ah, blest! who bathed the parchèd Vine
 With richer than His Cana-wine,
 And heard, your most sharp supper past,
 "Ye kept the best wine to the last!"

Ah, happy who
 That sequestered secret knew,
 How sweeter than bee-haunted dells
 The blosmy blood of martyrs smells!
 Who did upon the scaffold's bed,
 The ceremonial steel between you, wed
 With God's grave proxy, high and reverend Death;
 Or felt about your neck, sweetly,
 (While the dull horde
 Saw but the unrelenting cord)
 The Bridegroom's arm, and that long kiss
 That kissed away your breath, and claimed you His.
 You did, with thrift of holy gain,
 Unvenoming the sting of pain,
 Hive its sharp heather-honey. Ye
 Had sentience of the mystery
 To make Abaddon's hookèd wings
 Buoy you up to starry things;
 Pain of heart, and pain of sense,
 Pain the scourge, ye taught to cleanse;
 Pain the loss became possessing;
 Pain the curse was pain the blessing.
 Chains, rack, hunger, solitude—these,
 Which did your soul from earth release,

Left it free to rush upon
 And merge in its compulsive sun.
 Desolated, bruised, forsaken,
 Nothing taking, all things taken,
 Lacerated and tormented,
 The stifled soul, in naught contented,
 On all hands straitened, cribbed, denied,
 Can but fetch breath o' the Godward side.
 Oh to me, give but to me
 That flower of felicity,
 Which on your topmost spirit ware
 The difficult and snowy air
 Of high refusal! and the heat
 Of central love which fed with sweet
 And holy fire i' the frozen sod
 Roots that had ta'en hold on God.

Unwithering youth in you renewed
 Those rosy waters of your blood,—
 The true *Fons Juventutis*—ye
 Pass with conquest that Red Sea,
 And stretch out your victorious hand
 Over the Fair and Holy Land;
 Compasses about
 With a ninefold-battled shout,
 Trumpet, and wind and clang of wings,
 And a thousand fiery things,
 And Heaven's triumphing spears: while far
 Beneath go down the Egyptian war—
 A loosed hillside—with brazen jar
 Underneath your dreadful blood,
 Into steep night. Celestial feud
 Not long forbears the Tudor's brood,
 Rule, unsoldered from his line,
 See unto the Scot decline;
 And the kin Scots' weird shall be
 Axe, exile and infamy;
 Till the German fill the room
 Of him who gave the bloody doom.

Oh by the Church's pondering art
 Late set and named upon the chart
 Of her divine astronomy,
 Though your influence from on high
 Long ye shed unnoted! Bright
 New cluster in our Northern night!
 Cleanse from its pain and undelight
 An impotent and tarnished hymn,
 Whose marish exhalations dim
 Splendours they would transfuse! And thou
 Kindle the words which blot thee now,
 Over whose sacred corse unheard
 Europe veiled her face, and cursed
 The regal mantle grained in gore
 Of Genius, Freedom, Faith and More!

Ah, happy Fool of Christ! unawed
 By familiar sanctities,
 You served your Lord at holy ease.
 Dear Jester in the Courts of God!
 In whose spirit, enchanting yet,
 Wisdom and love, together met,
 Laughed on each other for content!
 That an inward merriment,
 An inviolate soul of pleasure
 To your motions taught a measure
 All your days; which tyrant king,
 Nor bonds, nor any bitter thing
 Could embitter or perturb;
 No daughter's tears, nor more acerb,
 A daughter's frail declension from
 Thy serene example, come
 Between thee and thy much content.
 Nor could the last sharp argument
 Turn thee from thy sweetest folly;
 To the keen *accolade* and holy
 Thou didst bend low a sprightly knee,
 And jest Death out of gravity
 As a too sad-visaged friend;

So, jocund, passing to the end
 Of thy laughing martyrdom,
 And now from travel art gone home
 Where, since gain of thee was given,
 Surely there is more mirth in heaven!

Thus, in Fisher and in thee,
 Arose the purple dynasty,
 The anointed Kings of Tyburn tree;
 High in act and word each one.
 He that spake—and to the sun
 Pointed—"I shall shortly be
 Above yon fellow." He too, he
 No less high of speech and brave,
 Whose word was: "Though I shall have
 Sharp dinner, yet I trust in Christ
 To have a most sweet supper." Priced
 Much by men that utterance was
 Of the doomed Leonidas,—
 Not more exalt than these, which note
 Men who thought as Shakespeare wrote.

But more lofty eloquence
 Than is writ by poets' pens
 Lives in your great deaths: O these
 Have more fire than poesies!
 And more ardent than all ode
 The pomps and raptures of your blood!
 By that blood ye hold in fee
 This earth of England; Kings are ye,
 And ye have armies—Want, and Cold,
 And heavy judgements manifold
 Hung in the unhappy air, and Sins
 That the sick gorge to heave begins,
 Agonies, and Martyrdoms,
 Love, Hope, Desire, and all that comes
 From the unwatered soul of man
 Gaping on God. These are the van

Of conquest, these obey you ; these,
And all the strengths of weaknesses,
That brazen walls disbed. Your hand,
Princes, put forth to the command,
And levy upon the guilty land
Your saving wars ; on it go down,
Black beneath God's and heaven's frown ;
Your prevalent approaches make
With unsustainable Grace, and take
Captive the land that captived you ;
To Christ enslave ye and subdue
Her so bragged freedom : for the crime
She wrought on you in antique time,
Parcel the land among you : reign,
Viceroys to your sweet Suzerain !
Till she shall know
This lesson in her overthrow :
Hardest servitude has he
That's gaoled in arrogant liberty ;
And freedom, spacious and unflawed,
Who is walled about with God.

To the English martyrs.



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